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OLD CHATHAM
and
Neighbouring Dwellings
South of the Berkshires

With Introductory Text by
Alwyn T Covell

White Pine Bureau

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ANNOUNCEMENT

OWING to the Printers' Strike, which paralyzed all New York print shops, this number of *The White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs*, scheduled to be issued on October first, has just been released by the settlement of the strike.

In view of the unavoidable situation, it is asked that this number, dated "October, 1919, Volume V, Number 5," be accepted for the two numbers usually published during the last four months of the year.

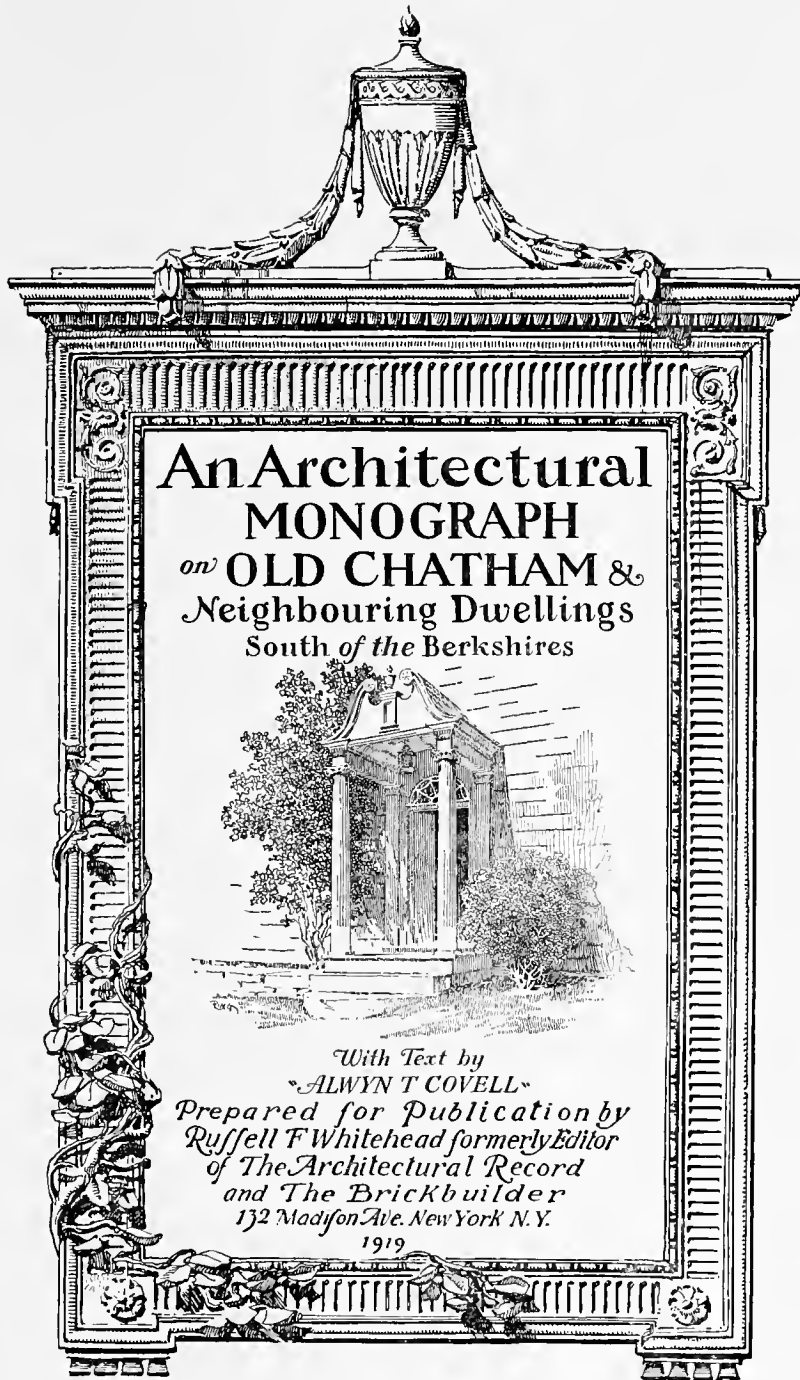
Volume VI will be published during 1920 bi-monthly, as in past years. Numbers will be issued on the first of February, of April, of June, of August, of October, and of December.

December 1, 1919



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An Architectural
MONOGRAPH
on OLD CHATHAM &
Neighbouring Dwellings
South of the Berkshires



With Text by
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HOUSE AT CHATHAM CENTER, NEW YORK. Detail of Entrance and Front Façade.

The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION SUGGESTING THE
ARCHITECTURAL USES OF WHITE PINE AND ITS
AVAILABILITY TODAY AS A STRUCTURAL WOOD

Vol. V

OCTOBER, 1919

No. 5

OLD CHATHAM AND NEIGHBOURING DWELLINGS SOUTH OF THE BERKSHIRES

By ALWYN T. COVELL

Contributions by this writer have appeared for some years in "The Architectural Record," "Arts and Decoration," and "Good Furniture Magazine." He is an observant critic with a well-based point of view.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNETH CLARK

ONE of the most interesting peculiarities of Early American domestic architecture is its "localism," its adherence to type within the confines, often, of a very restricted locality.

There are, of course, the broad, general divisions of types, or styles, with which we are generally familiar—the domestic architecture of the New England States, of the Middle Atlantic States, and of the South.

These broad divisions, however, would by no means serve to identify all Early American dwellings, because there were sub-styles, and distinctly local styles, many of which were radically at variance with the "typical example."

In the South, for instance, all the great houses did not have classic colonnaded porticoes. Besides the Creole type of the far South (a type absolutely peculiar to the locality), there were a great many differing varieties of the style of the Classic Revival, and there were also the detached houses found in Richmond, Charleston, Norfolk, Annapolis, Alexandria, Baltimore and elsewhere in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas. All could be classed as "Southern," but there are wide differences in their characteristics.

In the Middle Atlantic States there are the varieties developed by the early pioneer settlers of Pennsylvania as well as by its later more prosperous families. Different, again, is the farmhouse of the Dutch colonists, who built in the northern part of New Jersey, on Staten Island and Long Island, through New York State well up into the Mohawk Valley, and, on the west bank of the Hudson, throughout the Ramapo Hills and the Catskills.

In New England is found further variety, with widely different types, seen in isolated farmhouses and in the substantial homes of the merchants and ship-owners of Salem, Newport and New Bedford.

It is the purpose of this monograph, however, to show how a particular type of house, its identity traceable through detail, appears scattered in an irregular line southward from the Berkshires to the vicinity of Danbury, in Connecticut. And a remarkable proof of the close localism of Early American types of domestic architecture is seen in the fact that the examples illustrated, although found but a few miles from Litchfield, possess characteristics pronouncedly different.

A departure of a few miles from Connecticut is made in the inclusion of the unusually interesting houses in and near Old Chatham, which is over the New York State line due west from Pittsfield and Lenox, and due northwest from Stockbridge and Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

It is permissible, however, to include these old Chatham houses with the Connecticut examples found at Sharon, Kent, Danbury and adjacent townships, because their architectural affinity is at once apparent.

The houses show far more imagination and sophistication in matters of detail than those of Litchfield, the use of Palladian windows being the most conspicuous common feature. Nothing in Litchfield, however, resembles the fine old house at Chatham Center shown in the illustrations on pages two, four, five and six.

This house and others included in this monograph show a marked tendency to develop the

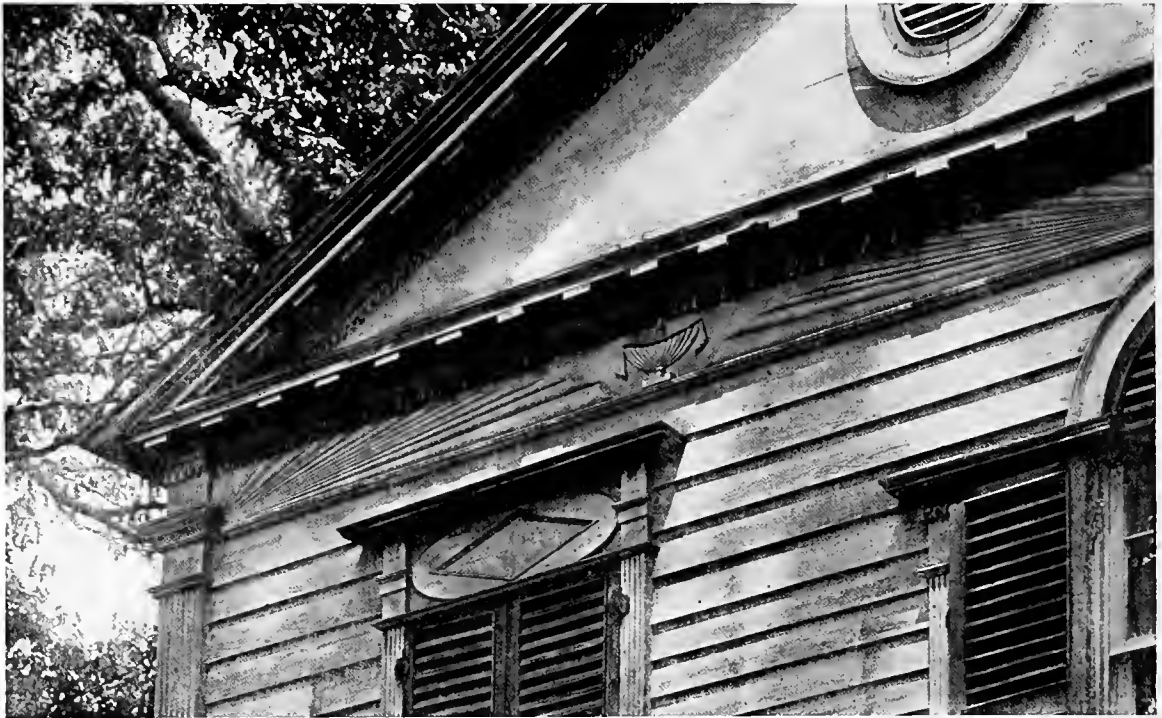
design of the entrance by the elaboration of the porch. Fan-lights and side-lights were frequently used, and the Palladian window above the entrance appears to have been the *sine qua non* of the really pretentious house of this type.

It was also a favorite device to plaster the under side of the hood in the forms of cylindrical or elliptical barrel vaults, instead of the plastered quarter-spherical treatment of typical Pennsylvania origin, the "Germantown hood." It would seem, further, that it was the fashion to paint the plaster in these early Connecticut porch-vaults (including the Chatham, New York, examples) a rich shade of blue.

strict classicism, as is apparent not only in the care-free disregard of the traditional relationship of the members of a classic entablature, but in such quaint vagaries as the continuous fringe of regula, alternating long and short, with no attempt at triglyphs to relate them to the guttae of the projection immediately above.

With a thorough knowledge of classic precedents and proportions, it would probably be quite impossible to make the naïve departures from rule which, in the case of these early master-carpenters, were crowned with peculiar success.

For the preservation of these delightful evi-



Detail of Entablature and Window Head.
HOUSE AT CHATHAM CENTER, NEW YORK.

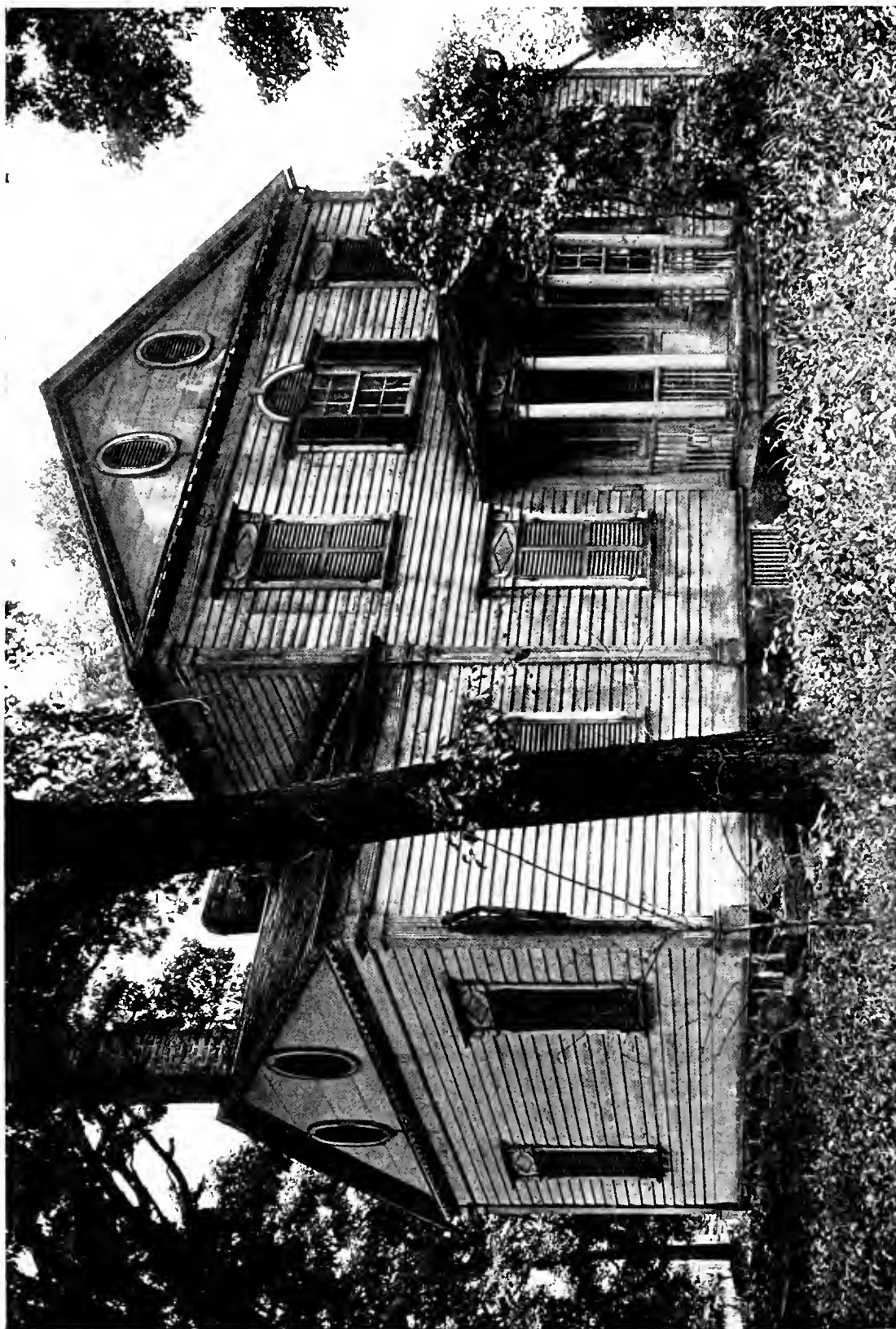
Most interesting of all, however, is a study of the detail of these houses,—detail of which the precedent is lost in obscurity. Certainly some echo of Georgian feeling reached these builders, yet their execution and their departures from academic forms suggest that the Georgian influence was not had at first hand. The bas-relief urns and sunbursts in the frieze of the house at Chatham Center certainly recall the style of the brothers Adam, as does also the strong leaning toward elliptical forms, but the manner in which these are carried out is one of extreme architectural naïveté.

The cornices are distinctly classic in general character, but again depart vigorously from any

dences of architectural ingenuousness, it is fortunate that the builders of our early days carried out virtually all their work in white pine, which has held its form without disintegration for the successive decades in which no protective coats of paint have rejuvenated the gray and weather-beaten exteriors.

It is probable, however, the builders of these old houses, especially of those which display a profusion of detail, favored white pine because of the ease with which clear mouldings could be run from it, and because of its receptiveness to the carver's tool.

In the gable end of one of the wings of the Chatham Center house are seen planks of ex-



HOUSE AT CHATHAM CENTER, NEW YORK.

traordinary width. In many respects this old house affords rich material for study. The treatment of the windows and of the corner pilasters shows a high degree of architectural instinct, when we realize, in the whole house, ample evidence of a lack of academic architectural knowledge. The presence of strong architectural instinct is felt, also, in the whole mass of the house, for no architect of to-day would hesitate to admit that the management of gabled wings, flush with the main façade, is a difficult problem. Few, indeed, would attempt to under-

the manner of dentils, as a purely decorative treatment of the window-heads. The square-headed Palladian window over the porch is excellent in proportion, and well in character with the breadth and amplitude apparent in the whole design.

Travelling southward from Chatham, and back over the State line into Connecticut, but a few miles from Litchfield, Sharon is found to possess a number of very interesting houses. These, for the most part, are more developed in detail than the Litchfield houses, the scale of the



Cornice Detail.

HOUSE AT CHATHAM CENTER, NEW YORK.

take such a problem, and fewer still would achieve so successful a result.

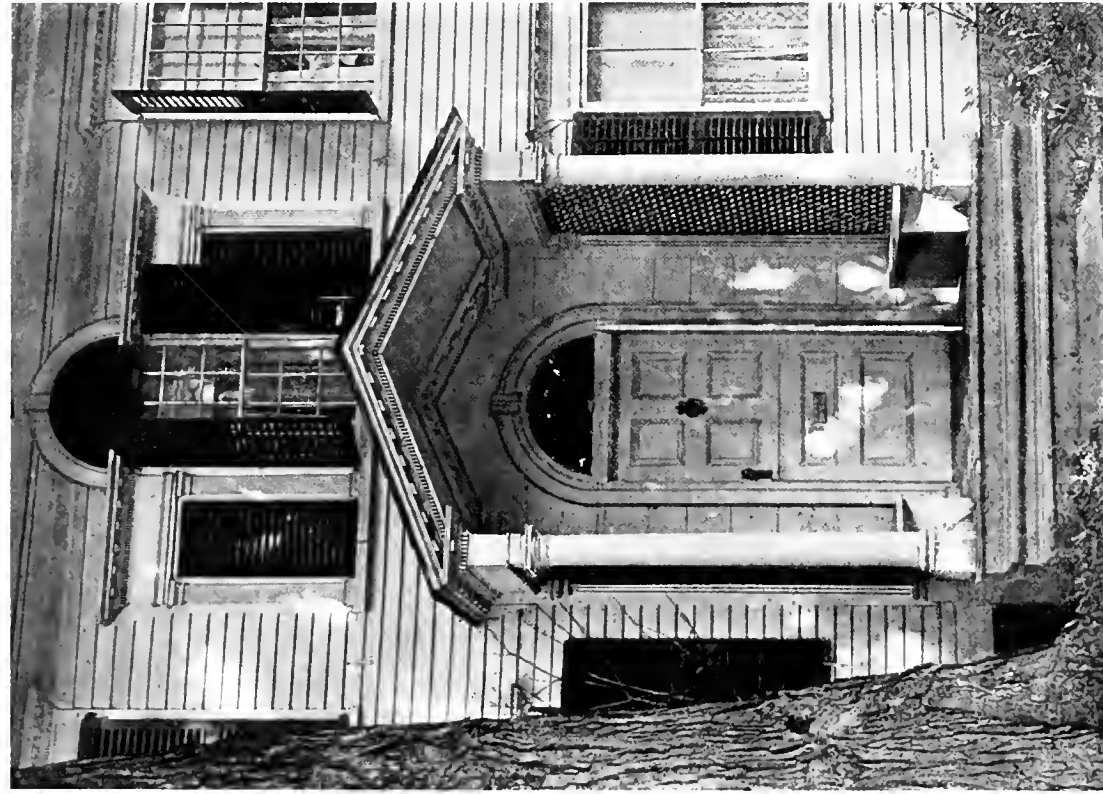
The Harper house, at Old Chatham, presents a distinctly graceful porch, and another instance of bas-relief sunbursts in the frieze, strangely unrelated to the windows immediately below, but highly interesting in itself.

The third house, found near Old Chatham, is an unusually interesting one, conspicuous, as a "four-square" mass, for its admirably dignified and static proportions. Its siding boards are not lapped, but flush (an unusual detail for this locality), but its detail is closely in character with other houses in the vicinity. The entablature follows a more nearly classic formula, with its frieze detailed in a way to suggest triglyphs and metopes, though reguli are used, almost in

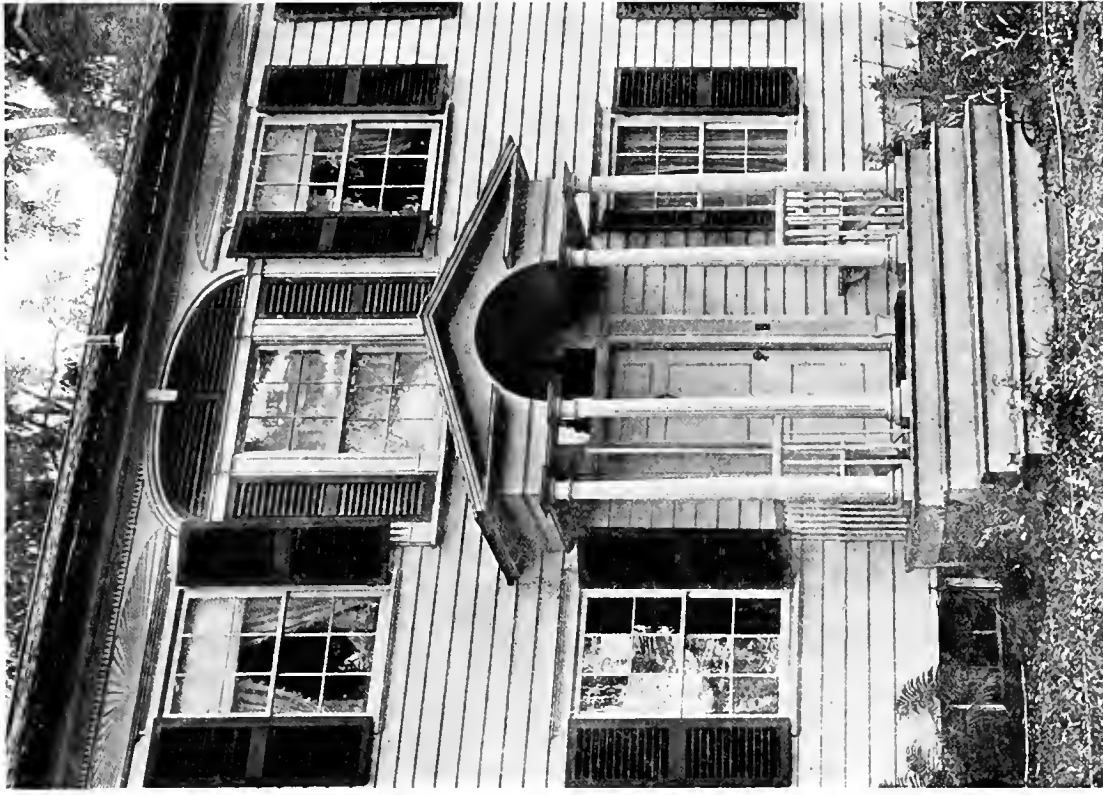
dentils and mouldings of the house illustrated on page seven being unusually fine.

The embellishment of the frieze, seen in the old house at Chatham, is also apparent in Sharon, the detail of the house on page thirteen being most effective.

Another interesting frieze treatment is seen in the Bacon house, at Kent, Connecticut—a house also possessing a number of other features. Especially interesting is the little rear porch, with tapered square posts, and the elaborate treatment of all the window-heads. In the frieze, which is carried not only across the gable ends, but up into the peaks as well, there has been an evident intention of following classic precedent in the suggestion of triglyphs, though the alternate spaces are too narrow for metopes.



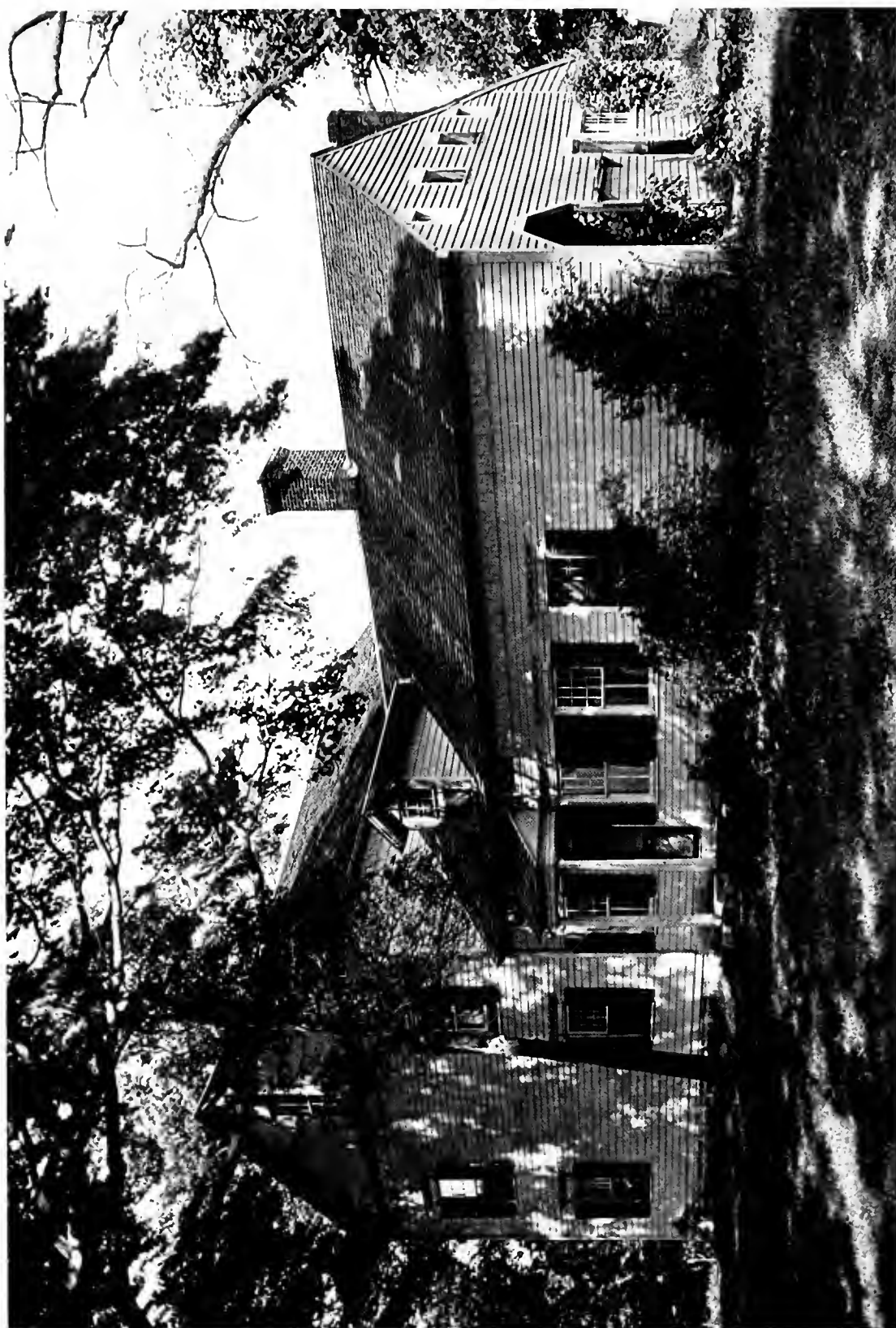
Detail of Entrance,
HOUSE AT SHARON, CONNECTICUT.



Detail of Entrance Porch and Front Façade,
HARPER HOUSE, OLD CHATHAM, NEW YORK.



HOUSE NEAR OLD CHATHAM, NEW YORK.



BACON HOUSE, KENT, CONNECTICUT.

The curious half-circles in the upper part of these spaces must have been meant to create, by their shadows, the effect of festoons.

At Danbury are found several houses of similar type—especially similar in the general design and detail of the porches. At Sandy Hook, in Connecticut, however, the resemblance swings far more closely toward the kind of house characteristic of Litchfield—plain, clapboarded, sitting close to the grade, and with entrance doors approached only by a broad stone step, and no porch.

Much of the interesting quality of Colonial

tectural genius. Many were downright stupid, but most of them, if we are to judge from their works, were strangely endowed with an inherent sense of architectural fitness.

Not all their detail was developed from books, though such famous works as "The Country Builder's Assistant" had wide popularity. Such forms, however, as may have been found in the "Assistant," and other similar works, are often seen to have been only the basis upon which the more imaginative country builder developed a remarkable variety of individual interpretations.

If these American builders had known more



BACON HOUSE, KENT, CONNECTICUT.

and Early American domestic architecture, especially in localities remote from the more sophisticated and resourceful cities, came from the fact that nearly all the carpenters and builders in those days were their own architects as well.

There were but few men professionally practicing architecture apart from the actual building of the houses they were designing, and this made possible much of the peculiar kind of individuality characterizing our early domestic architecture.

Perhaps we instinctively admire the successes and ignore the failures of these early builders, which is both a natural and a generous thing to do. Certainly every country builder was by no means gifted with even a faint spark of archi-

about architectural precedent, or had known less than they did, their works would have been of a nature considerably different from the examples which survive.

But we cannot very well reckon their work in terms of architectural *knowledge*; these early builders had a thing which is, perhaps, rarer today—a keen and vigorous architectural *instinct*.

It was this that saved much of their work from being either grotesque or stupid, and which gave it many qualities which could never have been attained through mere architectural knowledge—qualities which afford a wealth and variety of inspiration to those architects of today who turn to Early American types for the rendering of the modern American home.



BACON HOUSE, KENT, CONNECTICUT. Detail, Side Doorway.



HOUSE AT SANDY HOOK, CONNECTICUT.



ANOTHER HOUSE AT SANDY HOOK, CONNECTICUT.



HOUSE AT SHARON, CONNECTICUT.



HOUSE NEAR SHARON, CONNECTICUT.
"Jackson Farm"



HOUSE IN WEST STREET, DANBURY, CONNECTICUT. Entrance Detail.

SPECIFICATION CLAUSES FOR A WHITE PINE HOUSE

CLASS 3

HOUSE OF LOW COST WHERE COST IS THE FIRST AND QUALITY A SECONDARY CONSIDERATION

COMPILED FROM THE *WHITE PINE SPECIFICATION BOOK* AND SUGGESTED
BY THE WHITE PINE BUREAU FOR USE IN WHITE PINE HOUSES OF THE THIRD CLASS

CLAUSE A:

Stock: All white pine used shall be Northern White Pine, or Idaho White Pine, known botanically as *Pinus Strobus* or *Pinus Monticola*. It must possess the natural characteristics, viz.: Closeness of grain, evenness of fiber and softness of texture. It shall be milled to dimensions under the White Pine Standard Grading Rules of the Northern Pine Manufacturers' Association—or Western Pine Manufacturers' Association—or White Pine Association of the Tonawandas.

(Cross out the two which do not apply)

CLAUSE B:

For structural uses the grades shall be as follows:

| | Northern Pine Manufacturers' Association | Western Pine Manufacturers' Association | White Pine Association of the Tonawandas |
|---|---|--|--|
| Posts and girders..... | No. 1 White Pine Timbers | No. 1 White Pine Timbers | No. 1 White Pine Timbers |
| Sills and plates..... | No. 2 White Pine Dimension | No. 1 White Pine Dimension | Thick No. 1 White Pine Box |
| Joists and rafters..... | No. 2 White Pine Dimension | No. 1 White Pine Dimension | Thick No. 1 White Pine Box |
| Studding, partition sills and plates, bridging or similar work..... | No. 2 White Pine Dimension | No. 1 White Pine Dimension | Thick No. 1 White Pine Box |
| Rough floors..... | No. 4 White Pine Common Boards | No. 4 White Pine Common Boards | No. 2 White Pine Box |
| Sheathing and roof boards..... | No. 4 White Pine Common Boards or No. 4 White Pine Fencing | No. 4 White Pine Common Boards or No. 4 White Pine Fencing | No. 2 White Pine Box |
| Lath..... | No. 2 Lath (not all White Pine) | No. 2 White Pine Lath | No. 2 Lath (not all White Pine) |
| CLAUSE C: | | | |
| For exterior work the grades shall be as follows: | | | |
| All finished work, moulded or plain, except as below otherwise specified..... | White Pine "D" Select Finishing or No. 1 White Pine Common Boards | No. 1 White Pine Common Boards | No. 2 White Pine Barn Boards |
| Beveled siding..... | White Pine "D" Beveled Siding | White Pine "D" Beveled Siding | White Pine Stained Sap Siding or White Pine Star Clear Siding or No. 3 White Pine Siding |
| Other sidings (cove, novelty, rustic, 8 to 12-inch clapboards)..... | No. 1 or No. 2 White Pine Common Boards | No. 1 or No. 2 White Pine Common Boards | No. 2 White Pine Barn Boards |
| Sash, doors and blinds..... | White Pine Factory Lumber | White Pine Factory Lumber | White Pine Factory Lumber |
| Ceiling..... | White Pine "D" Flooring—Beaded | White Pine "D" Flooring—Beaded | No. 2 White Pine Dressing or No. 1 White Pine Barn Boards D. and M. and Beaded |
| Flooring..... | White Pine "D" Flooring | White Pine "D" Flooring | No. 2 White Pine Boards |

SPECIFICATION CLAUSES FOR A WHITE PINE HOUSE

CLASS 3

HOUSE OF LOW COST WHERE COST IS THE FIRST AND QUALITY A SECONDARY CONSIDERATION

COMPILED FROM THE *WHITE PINE SPECIFICATION BOOK* AND SUGGESTED
BY THE WHITE PINE BUREAU FOR USE IN WHITE PINE HOUSES OF THE THIRD CLASS

Continued from page 15

| CLAUSE D: | For interior finish the grades shall be as follows: All exposed finished work, moulded or plain.... | Northern Pine Manufacturers' Association | | Western Pine Manufacturers' Association | | White Pine Association of the Tonawandas | |
|-----------|--|---|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| | | White Pine "D" Select Finishing or No. 1 White Pine Common Boards | No. 4 White Pine Boards | White Pine "D" Select Finishing or No. 1 White Pine Common Boards | No. 4 White Pine Boards | No. 2 White Pine Dressing or No. 2 White Pine Barn Boards | No. 2 White Pine Dressing or No. 2 White Pine Barn Boards—in One Inch |
| | Linings, backing or work concealed from view.. | | | | | | |
| | Flooring | White Pine "D" Flooring | | White Pine "D" Flooring or No. 1 White Pine Fencing Flooring | | | |
| | Kitchen cupboards, pantry and closet shelving, flour bins, kitchen cabinets, wainscoting and partitions, etc. Kitchen, attic and cellar stairs.. | No. 1 or No. 2 White Pine Common Boards | | No. 1 or No. 2 White Pine Common Boards | | | No. 2 White Pine Barn Boards D. and M. |

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